

Sūrah 79

Al-Nāzi'āt

(The Soul Pluckers)

(Makkan Period)

Title

This *Sūrah*'s title is taken from its opening word.

Period of Revelation

According to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Abbās, this chapter was revealed after *Sūrah al-Naba'*. It appears from its subject matter that it must have been revealed during the very early days of the Makkan period.

Subject Matter and Themes

Central to the *Sūrah* is an affirmation of the Last Day and Life-after-Death. Furthermore, it contains warnings against rejection of Allah's Messenger.

The *Sūrah* opens by invoking the angels. They are introduced as those who pluck out the souls at the time of death, who speedily obey Allah's commands and who carry out their Lord's orders in managing the affairs of the universe. With reference to these angels,

it is asserted that the Last Day is inevitable. So is Life-after-Death, which is bound to happen. The same angels who seize the souls in this world will restore the souls for the Next Life. The same angels who presently enforce Allah's commands in running the affairs of the universe will destroy, by Allah's leave, the present order; the old will give way to the new.

What people regard as impossible is not at all hard for Allah. He does not need to make any elaborate preparation to accomplish anything. Only a single tremor will destroy the present order. In the next stage, all human beings will find themselves restored to life in the Hereafter. Those who deny it presently will tremble with fear as they see with their own eyes what they used to dismiss as inconceivable.

This affirmation is followed by a brief account of the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him) and Pharaoh, with a view to reminding people that Pharaoh met with a horrible end as punishment for his rejection of the Prophet, of divine guidance and for his deception in trying to defeat the Prophet's mission. Hence, the unbelievers should better draw a lesson from all this. Otherwise, they are doomed for the same terrible end.

Verses 27-33 adduce arguments for the Day of Judgement and Life-after-Death. The unbelievers are asked as to which of the two is a more difficult task. Resurrecting them or creating this vast universe, with its innumerable planets, stars and celestial bodies? Since Allah did not find it at all hard to create them in the first place, it will be quite easy for Him to resurrect them. This weighty and incontrovertible proof regarding the Hereafter is followed by the enumeration of the bounties provided for human and animal life on earth. Each object testifies that it has been brought into being for a particular purpose. Man should exercise his reason whether it is logical or not to hold himself responsible for his own conduct, for his powers and for discharging his duties. Is it not a totally absurd proposition that man not be called to account for his good or bad deeds? Should he not be asked as to how he used his faculties and how he performed his duties? Or should man be allowed to get away with anything, scot-free?

Verses 34-41 relate how man will be recompensed on the Day of Judgement. His ultimate and eternal abode will be adjudged in

the light of his servitude to Allah. It will be determined whether he transgressed in rebelling against Allah and in taking worldly pleasures as his sole objective. It will be ascertained as to who feared his Lord and refrained from gratifying his base self. All this helps one answer the above questions about the need for the Reckoning, provided one honestly studies the issue, free from bigotry. For, reason, justice and morality demand that man, who is invested with power and authority, should eventually be adjudged and be rewarded or punished.

In the *Sūrah*'s last section, the unbelieving Makkans' query about the exact time of the Day of Judgement is addressed. Indeed, they put this question to the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) repeatedly. Here, they are told that Allah alone knows when it will be. The Prophet's assignment consists only in warning them about the inevitable Last Day. They are free to mend their ways out of fear of the Reckoning or disregard it altogether, while giving in to their base desires. On the appointed Day, those immersed in worldliness will feel that they had tarried in the world only for a brief time. Only then will they realize how they had ruined their prospects in the Hereafter, as a result of their preference for this short, ephemeral worldly life.